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CIA/OSR / MEMO SF 750624

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24 June 1975

MEMORANDUM

MICRO
ONLYSUBJECT: Status of the Missile Facility at Berbera
Somalia

1. The new missile storage and handling facility at Berbera may be placed under Somali control, at least temporarily. We believe that this facility was built to support Soviet naval operations in the Indian Ocean, and it probably will be used for that function eventually. The Soviet Navy does not have an urgent need for immediate access to this kind of facility, however, and the Soviets would derive considerable propaganda benefit if they could establish a convincing facade of Somali ownership of the installation.

2. The Somalis have reacted strongly to recent publicity about the existence of Soviet naval facilities at Berbera. In addition to stoutly denying the presence of any foreign bases in Somalia, they have issued invitations for outside parties to inspect the Berbera area. This in itself is not new, as such invitations have been made in the past--for example, last year to the US Ambassador in Mogadiscio and more recently to high level Saudi Arabian officials. For various reasons, the Somalis were not taken up on previous offers. In the present case, however, a CBS news team has accepted a Somali offer and arrived in Mogadiscio on 20 June en route to Berbera. In addition, a formal invitation has been issued by the Somalis to the Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee and to other senators and congressmen. These invitations place the Somalis in a position that would be difficult to hedge.

3. At this point, the Soviets could open the facility for visits without any really serious security problems. The facility is externally complete, but not yet operational. With the removal--or delayed delivery--of a relatively small quantity of special test and handling equipment, and the missiles themselves, a visit would not

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expose any sensitive data about Soviet missile capabilities. Although the Soviets ordinarily would be loath to open such a facility to public scrutiny, in this case the political considerations might outweigh their penchant for excessive security.

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4. Western visitors, even those who have been briefed on the facilities at Berbera, would probably find it impossible to establish that the missile facility is, in fact, intended for the Soviet Navy. If [redacted]

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[redacted] the facility were filled with industrial equipment or small arms ammunition, for example, few Western observers could prove that the facility was missile-related, let alone Soviet-controlled. Alternatively, [redacted] might be left in place to provide a convenient cover-- that the facility is a Somali missile installation. This would beg the question, however, as to why the Somalis have the missiles, but no launch platforms, and why the facility is so much more elaborate than Styx missile facilities elsewhere.

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5. Aside from the missile facility, the Soviets would have little trouble covering their military presence in Berbera. Somali guards could be placed at the Soviet naval communications station, for example, and Westerners could be told that it is a restricted Somali communications site and consequently not open for scrutiny. The Somalis have never denied that the Soviets can conduct port calls at Berbera, hence the presence of Soviet ships in port would disclose nothing new. Work on the new airfield and improved POL facilities could be presented as being general economic/military aid projects. In addition, the Soviet housing compound could be explained as housing for Soviet civilian advisors and technicians.

6. The Soviets would gain a number of benefits by temporarily turning the facility over to the Somalis for exhibit to Westerners:

-- It would embarrass the US government which has directly related the development of US

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Navy facilities on Diego Garcia to Soviet developments in Berbera.

- It might serve to reassure the Egyptians, with whom relations have been strained by the Berbera disclosures as well as by the Soviet-Libyan accord.
- It would provide improved cover for future Soviet operations in Berbera.
- It would make US intelligence look bad at a time when the intelligence community is already under heavy domestic criticism.